CATALOGUES OF ART EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
20 Newmarket Road
Cambridge CB5 8DT
England

Chadwyck-Healey Inc
623 Martense Avenue
Teaneck NJ 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1982

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers.

Serial numbers: Each title is identified by a three-part serial number. The first part of the serial number designates the sales list in which the title was first announced. The second part indicates the agent of publication, i.e. the museum, gallery or organisation that was responsible for the publication of the catalogue. The third part of the serial number is the number allotted to that title.

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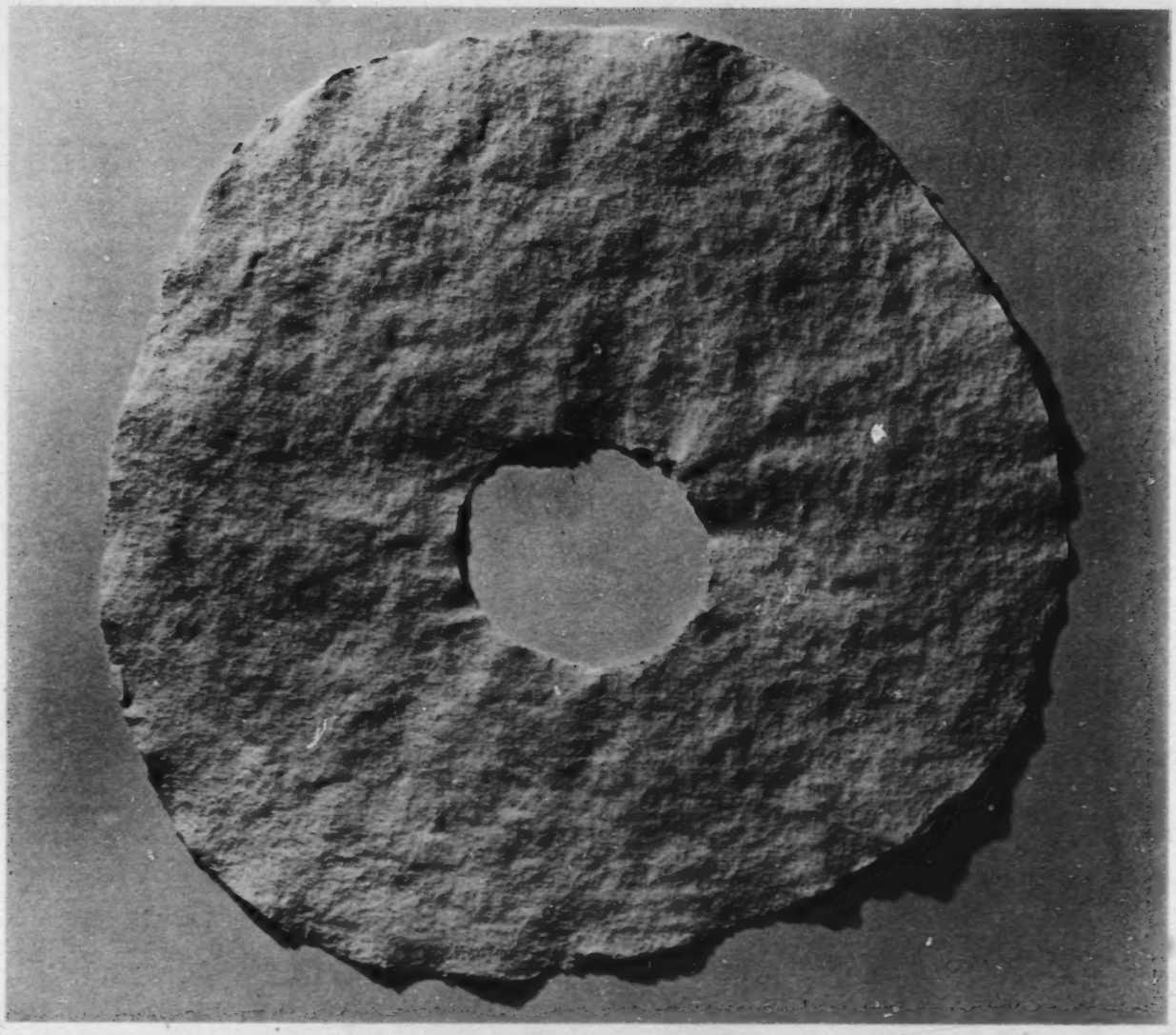
Location of original: Arts Council of Great Britain, 105 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AU.

Technical data: Producing laboratory: Chadwyck-Healey Microform Publishing Services, 10 North End, Bassingbourn, Cambs., England.

List 33



An Arts Council Exhibition

Pages and Fuses and other prints

by Robert Rauschenberg

Photograph by John Webb

Acknowledgements

In producing this catalogue we have relied heavily upon publishers kindly allowing us to quote the words of Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage previously printed in their books and periodicals. We should like to thank the Wesleyan University Press, Weidenfeld and Nicolson and the editors of Art in America, Art News and the Print Collector's Newsletter.

We are also grateful to Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles, who published the prints for supplying and allowing us to reproduce colour photographs of the prints and the photographs taken by Gianfranco Gorgoni of Rauschenberg working in Ambert.

Introduction

In retrospect it is possible to see the step from the images of **Horsefeathers Thirteen** shapes within the paper area – to shaped paper becoming the image as it does in **Pages** and **Fuses**. With **Pages** he wanted to experiment in the "form being the *print*" and, in **Fuses** in "*painting* with paper". With economy and richness, Rauschenberg brings the act of making paper into printmaking, and printmaking into the realm of sculpture.

M H April 1975

The Making of 'Pages' and 'Fuses'

Rauschenberg's words are quoted from an article by Joseph E. Young, Assistant Curator of Prints at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in the Print Collector's Newsletter, New York May-June 1973.

"One of the things I like most about making prints . . . is that printmaking is a collaboration: not only with people but with materials too. I'm a strong believer that two people having good ideas can produce more together than two people working separately. Collaboration not only takes the self-consciousness out of the artist, but the total result is generally so much greater, almost immeasurably."

In the summer of 1973 Rauschenberg spent four days making the series **Pages** and **Fuses** at the 14th Century Richard de Bas papermill at Ambert, south-east of Aubusson in the Auvergne region of France.

"I had no preconceived ideas when I went to France to do this project. I was merely interested in shapes and prints that could come out of an artist's having made paper. There were just two basic areas that I wanted to experiment with. One was the form being the *print* and the other idea I wanted to pursue was *painting* with paper."

Most of the prints were formed in moulds especially made to Rauschenberg's design. For **Pages** two vats of pulp made from rags were prepared, one unbleached, the other

bleached. These pulps were then mixed in five buckets providing five gradations of grey.

"I poured the pulp for the entire edition called **Pages** using five mixtures of a combination of bleached and unbleached *rag* which looked very like bad yoghurt. This process used little more than pulp and water which was actually melted snow from the mountains. The pulp was icy cold, but when it was pressed and dried it looked almost like weaving."

The excess water was shaken out and the moulded pulp turned out onto a piece of felt, prior to pressing out more water. This process is known as couching.

In **Page One** an actual rag is embodied in the paper. No mould was used.

"I started working freely, avoiding any particular psychological association with the shape I was making, because I wanted the piece to look like itself rather than something else. I poured the pulp and couched it. And then I put the rag in, which, by the way, is from the same rags that the paper is made from. And then I made another shape. These pieces required two couchings and are actually two laminated forms. There is a great variation in design in the paper because of the lamination and the difference of the first and second shapes. The second form was to influence the first, since aesthetically the second form was not to adjust for thinness of the paper but to eliminate any psychological reading of form. It's very difficult to have free shapes without any reference."

"I am calling the coloured ones **Fuses** due to all the organic *bleeds* of colours moving from one area of the paper to another and also because of the *fusing* of the image and the colours to make a print."

Light-fast pigments made especially for papermaking were added to the pulp before it was poured into the moulds.

"I sketched shapes and a plumber in Ambert made some moulds from my drawings. Later I marked the moulds where the colours were to start and stop. For the **Fuses** I used all liquid dyes that ordinarily are used a lot less generously in papermaking. First the pulp was poured into the mould where nothing designated the areas to be coloured except pencil marks on the edges. All the colours were mixed in separate buckets and then just *sponged* out. And the bleeds happened in the initial pressing. None of these works have been pressed twice. I knew the *bleeds* would work and it would be obvious how they were made. You could never obtain that effect on a printing press, even though the **Fuses** are actually prints."

before leaving for Ambert, Rauschenberg had given instructions for the silkscreen printing of magazine images onto Japanese tissue. They were to be printed in four colours – each colour printed slightly off register so that each element of printing would be evident. He took these with him

I thought of the images on tissue like a palette or a box of pencils – just in case. When you're going into a strange place it's good to take something that's a little bit familiar to you. Still, there were many that we didn't use."

The images were applied while the pulp was still wet before pressing.

For **Hind**, which has the largest silk-screened image, in order to bond the picture to the paper you had to touch the silkscreen paper on the tissue only in the clear, unprinted areas. And this had to be done for all the coloured prints. You had to find a place where there was clear colour. In the printed image of the bird in **Link**, for instance, this was done mostly in the unprinted border. It was like trying to flatten something on a bubble bath or on top of something that looks like an uncooked soufflé or a bunch of coloured yoghurt."

We were running out of time for the edition – and since this was such a unique process it seemed more interesting for me to make more editions than to complete the ones I had started. For each of the coloured ones I think I must have made approximately eight so that I could get a sense of the possible variations – and so that I could instruct Mr Petersen more as to what he should look out for.

At Gemini [the publishers] **I discovered that one coloured print turned out differently from what I had wanted, but I really couldn't tear it up because the process of making these works has its own integrity built in."**

That was **Vale**. As can be seen in the illustration, the central piece was to have a black oval white image of Bill Neal's head, one superimposed above the other. This image was missing and on the left the craftsman had also used an image of green which should not be there. It had been correctly printed off-register but with the wrong colour combinations. Rauschenberg decided to remove the image by monotinting and printing all the prints having a plain image. The version is known as **Vale [State]**.

The five **Pages** and six **Fuses** were published the following year.

"I'm not involved with expression at all – only to avoid it. I'd a fight my habit in art too. If the Fuses look as though they could not have been done by anyone else, then in some way I may have lost the battle. Whenever I work successfully, I feel I become invisible. The condition I strive for is a productive anonymity."

Rauschenberg on his Art

"I'd really like to think that the artist could be just another kind of material in the picture, working in collaboration with all the other materials. But of course I know this isn't possible, really. I know that the artist can't help exercising his control to a degree and that he makes all the decisions finally. But if I can just throw enough obstacles in the way of my own personal taste, then maybe the picture will turn out to be more interesting as a result." 1

For a young American artist in the late 1940s, the dominant movement in art which had to be encountered was the AbstractExpressionism of such artists as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

"There was something about the self-confession and self-confusion of Abstract Expressionism – as though the man and the work were the same – that personally always put me off because at that time my focus was in the opposite direction. I was busy trying to find ways where the imagery, the material and the meaning of the painting would be not in an illustration of my will, but more like an unbiased documentation of what I observed, letting the area of feeling and meaning take care of itself. I mean that literally. I felt an excitement at being in a city where you have on one lot a forty-storey building and

right next to it, you have a little shack. There is this constant irrational juxtaposition of things that one doesn't find in the countryside. I had travelled quite a lot in Europe just previously and had not found it there either; instead there's a kind of architectural harmony, everything is so much more cohesive than I have found in New York." [1]

In 1948 he attended Black Mountain College in North Carolina where Joseph Albers was teaching. The discipline which the former Bauhaus teacher offered, admittedly more aligned with the "harmonies" of Europe than with the "ironical juxtapositions" of New York, provided Rauschenberg with an effective counter to Abstract Expressionism and a means whereby he could define his own thoughts about painting.

"Albers' rule is to make order; as for me, I consider myself successful only when I do something that resembles the lack of order I sense." [1]

"When Albers showed me that one colour was as good as another and that you were just expressing a personal preference if you thought a certain colour would be better, I found that I couldn't decide to use one colour instead of another, because I really wasn't interested in taste. I was so involved with the materials separately that I didn't want painting to be simply an art of employing one colour to do something to another colour, like using red to intensify green, because that would imply some subordination of red. I was very hesitant about arbitrarily designing forms and selecting colours that would achieve some predetermined result, because I didn't have any ideas to support that sort of thing - I didn't want colour to serve me; in other words, that's why I ended up doing the all-white and the all-black paintings - one of the reasons, anyway." [1]

Rauschenberg disliked "the whole idea of conception execution - of getting an idea for a picture and then carrying it out" and rejected the self-engrossing subjectivity and strategies of much of 20th century art. From these reactions place the artist in a role of acceptance and open minded curiosity towards the materials he uses and his subject matter.

"I don't believe in chance anymore than I believe in anything else. With me, it's much more a matter of just accepting whatever happens, accepting all these elements from the outside and then trying to work with them in a sort of free collaboration. That's what makes painting an adventure, which is what it is for me." [1]

"I have certainly made use of the fact that paint will run. This is just a friendly relationship with materials – you want them for what they are rather than for what you can make out of them." 2

The collage assemblage works of the 1950s and '60s did not bring together the images of his sub-conscious but the elements of the world he saw around him. They included transferred newspaper and magazine pictures but, also, actual coke bottles, stuffed birds, clocks and switched-on radios.

"Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. I try to act in the gap between the two." 3

"I don't want a picture to look like something it isn't. I want it to look like something it is. And I think a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world." 4

"I'm never sure what the impulse is psychologically. I don't mess around with my subconscious. I try to keep wide awake. If I see any superficial subconscious relationship that I'm familiar with – cliches of association – I change the picture. I always have a good reason for taking something out but never have one for putting something in. I don't want to — because that means that the picture is being painted predigested." 5

Rauschenberg has always tried to maintain the independent identity of each element included in a work.

"I would like my pictures to be able to be taken apart as they're put together – so you can recognise an object when you're looking at it. Oil paint really does look like oil paint even in the most photographic painting." 6

As a *collaborator* he welcomes the stimulus of external change.

"One needs a certain amount of trouble to operate, some need more, some less. The creative process somehow has to include adjusting realistically to the situation." 2

"Every time I've moved, my work has changed radically and I think that if it didn't change naturally, that I'd do something about it to make it change. Some artists move into a new place and force on it a working attitude they remember as one they like. That attitude makes a kind of painting different from mine. My work was never a protest against what was going on, it was an expression of my own involvement." 2

"I am trying to check my habits of seeing to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing." 3

1 **Ahead of the Game**
Calvin Tompkins
first published as
The Bride and the Bachelors
Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1962

2 **The Artist speaks: Robert Rauschenberg**
Interview by Dorothy Gees Seckler
Art in America May 1966

3 **Silence**
John Cage
Wesleyan University Press 1961
but also quoted elsewhere

4 **Rauschenberg paints a Picture**
G R Swenson
Art News 1963

John Cage on Rauschenberg

The following is an excerpt from an article, On Rauschenberg, Art, and Relationship, *originally published in* Silence: Lectures and Writings, *Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, Connecticut, 1961. It was published in the catalogue of the Rauschenberg exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1964.*

Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look. [This is an American discovery.] Is when Rauschenberg looks an idea? Rather it is an entertainment in which to celebrate unfixity.

Ideas are not necessary. It is more useful to avoid having one, certainly avoid having several. [leads to inactivity]

Certainly Rauschenberg has techniques. But the ones he has he disuses, using those he hasn't. I must say he never forces a situation. He is like that butcher whose knife never became dull simply because he cut with it in such a way that it never encountered an obstacle. Modern art has no need for technique. [We are in the glory of not knowing what we're doing.]

Over and over again I've found it impossible to memorize Rauschenberg's paintings. I keep asking, "Have you changed it?" And then noticing while I'm looking it changes. I look out the window and see the icicles. There, dripping water is frozen into object.

To change the subject. "**Art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation.**" Or a net.

[*Of* **Rebus** *a combine painting of 1955*]
This is not a composition. It is a place where
things are, as on a table or in a town seen
from the air: any one of them could be
removed and another come into its place
through circumstances analogous to birth and
death, travel, housecleaning, or cluttering.
He is not saying, he is painting.

Having made the empty canvases ["**A canvas is never empty**"], Rauschenberg became the
giver of gifts. Gifts, unexpected and
unnecessary, are ways of saying Yes to how
it is, a holiday. The gifts he gives are not
picked up in distant lands but are things we
already have ["**with exceptions, of course: I needed a goat and the other stuffed birds since I don't have any, and I needed an attic in order to go through the family things (since we moved away, the relatives write to say: Do you still want them?)**], and so we are converted to the
enjoyment of our possessions. Converted
from what? From wanting what we don't
have, art as pained struggle.

Perhaps after all there is no message. In that
case one is saved the trouble of having to
reply, as the lady said: "Well, if it isn't art,
then I like it." Some [**a**] are to be made to hang
on a wall, others [**b**] to be in a room, still
others [**a**] [**b**]

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Arts Council of Great Britain 1975

A list of Arts Council publications,
including all exhibition catalogues in print,
can be obtained from the
Publications Department,
Arts Council of Great Britain,
105 Piccadilly, London W1V 0AU

Printed by
GLR Offset Limited

Cataloguing designed by
Trilokesh Mukherjee

ISBN No. 0 7287 0057 3

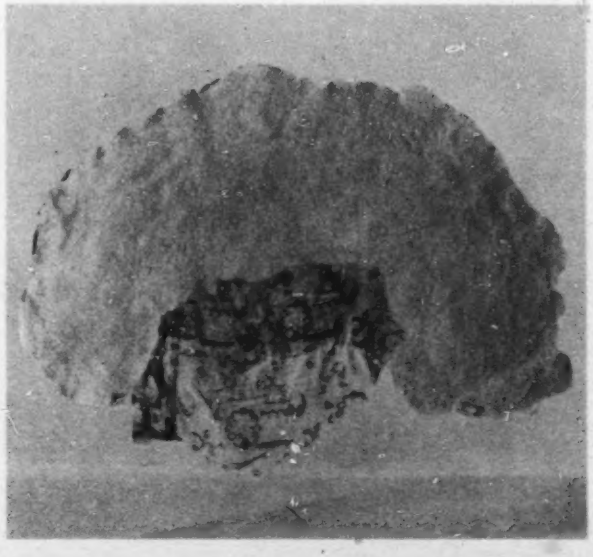
Pages
A series of five prints published by Gemini G.E.L. in 1974.

Fuses
A series of six prints published by Gemini G.E.L. in 1974
All are of handmade rag paper – separately coloured pulps – with magazine images screen-printed on Japanese tissue.

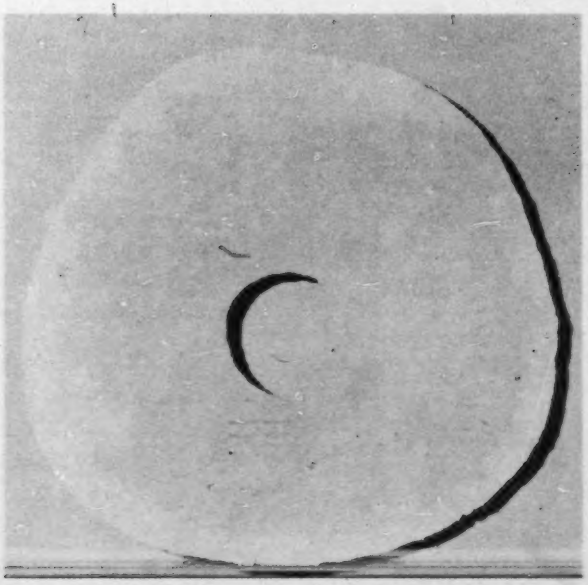
Horsefeathers Thirteen
A series of which eight prints were published by Gemini G.E.L. in 1973. Each print combines photo-offset lithography, silkscreen printing, stencil, collage and embossing.

Note:
The prints illustrated in this catalogue are not those exhibited. Variations – in some cases considerable – exist between each print of an edition.

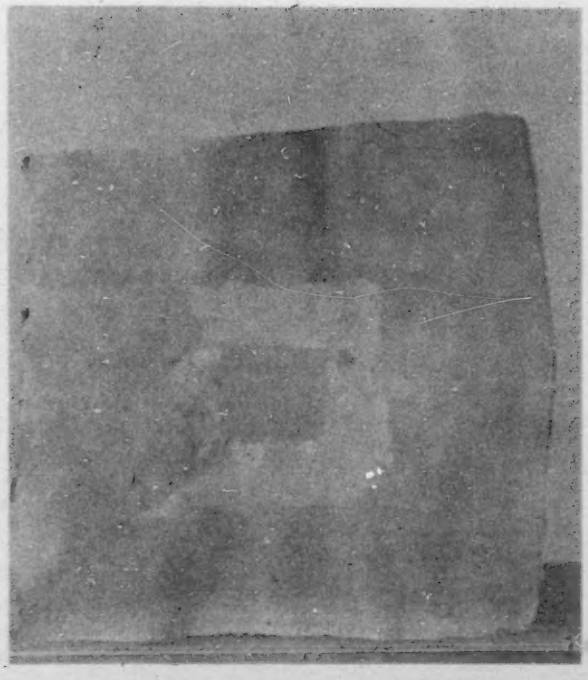
Pages
9
Page 1
33 × 58.5cm but varies considerably from one print to another.
Size of Edition: 27
Handmade rag paper and rag.
Pulp poured onto a wire mesh. No mould used.



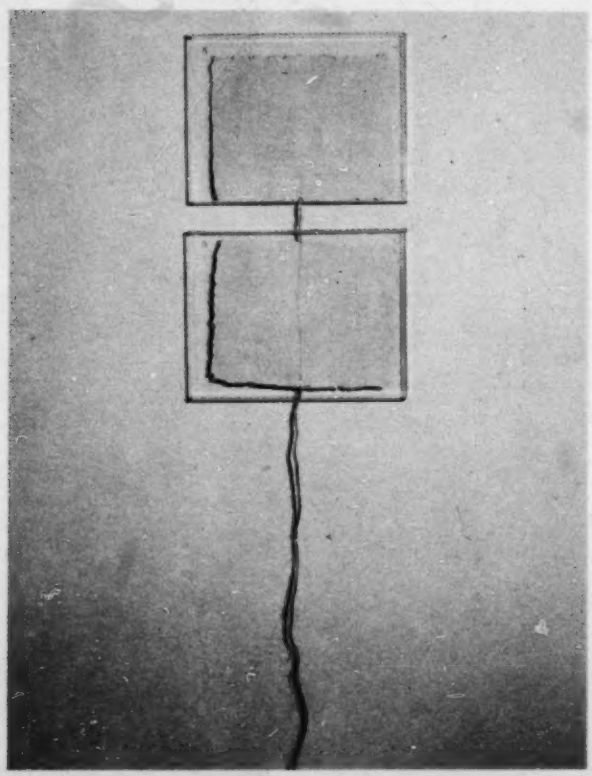
10
Page 2
56 × 56 cm
Size of Edition: 11
Handmade rag paper.
Four separate pulps of varying tone.



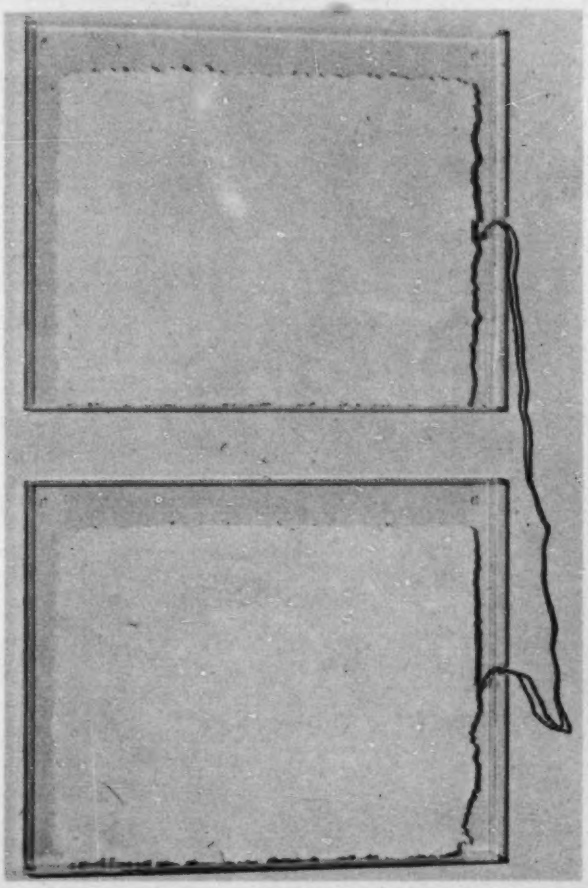
11
Page 3
47 × 48cm
Size of Edition: 35
Handmade rag paper.
Four separate pulps of varying tone.
Same mould used for Bit.



12
Page 4
Each sheet 38 × 51cm overall with twine 203 × 57cm
Size of Edition: 19
Top sheet rests at bottom of its drawer, bottom sheet suspended in its drawer, twine continues through the lower sheet and hangs to the floor.

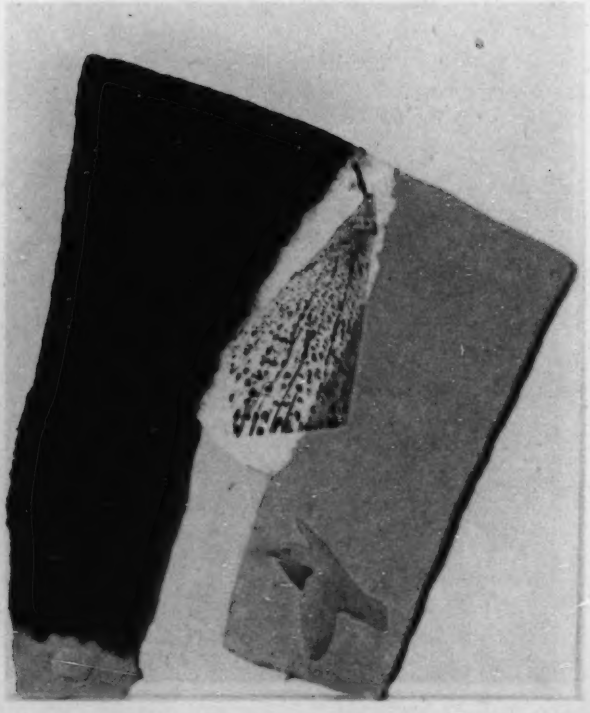


13
Page 5
Each sheet 53.5 × 68.5cm overall with twine 122 × 74cm
Size of Edition: 23
Each sheet rests on the bottom of the drawers.

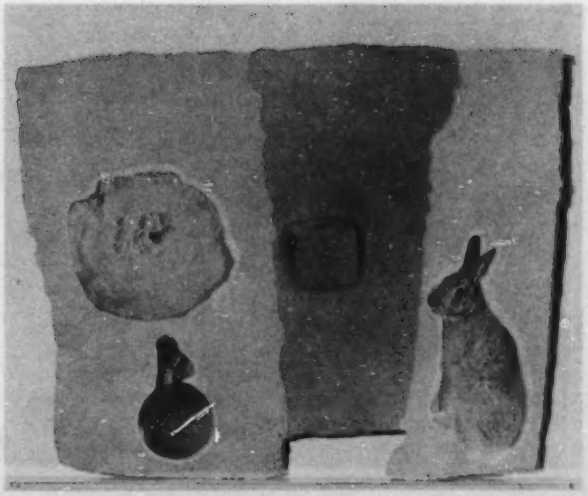


Fuses

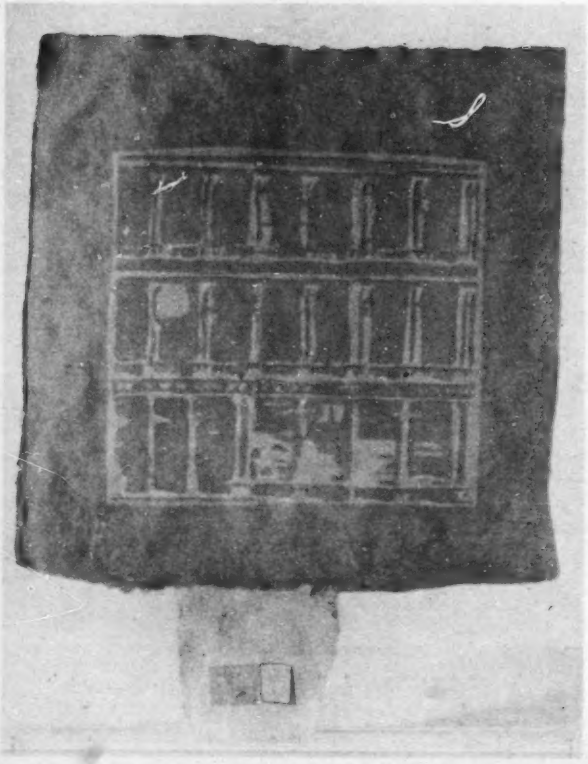
14
Link
63.5 × 51cm
Size of Edition: 29



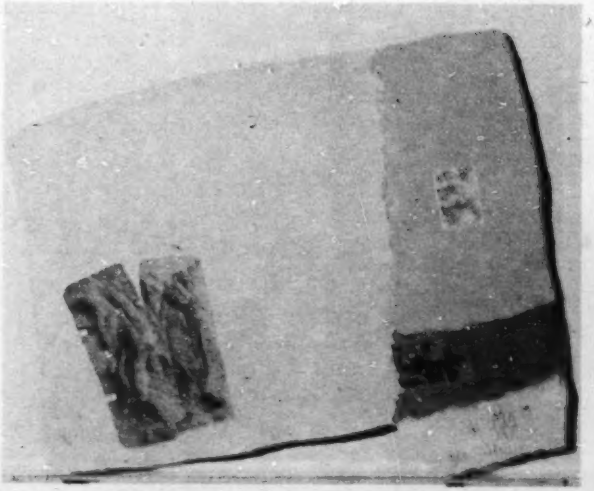
15
Roan
51 × 63.5cm
Size of Edition: 38
Same mould used for Vale and Vale State.



16
Hind
66 × 63.5cm
Size of Edition: 34

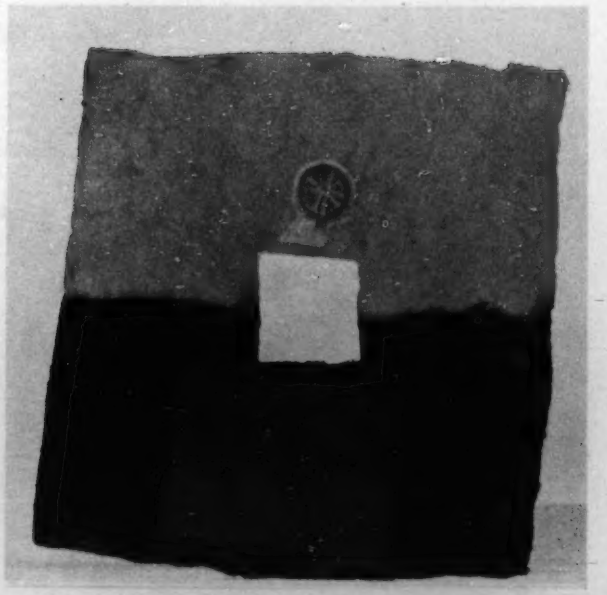


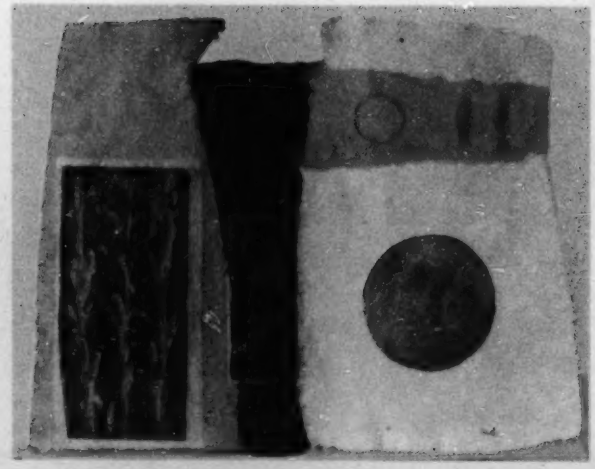
17
Scow
51 × 63.5cm
Size of Edition: 34



18
Bit
47 × 44.5cm
Size of Edition: 33
Same mould used for **Page 3.**

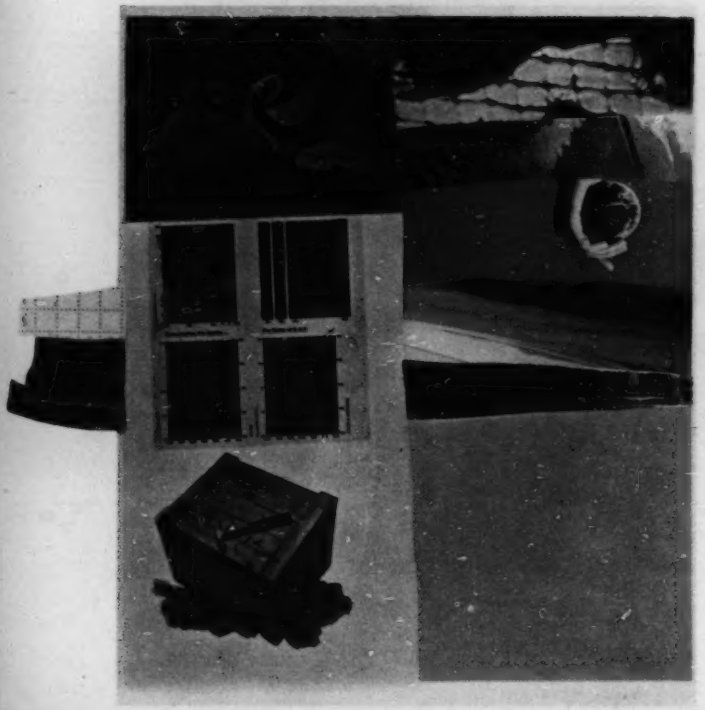
19
Vale [State]
49.5 × 63cm
Size of Edition: 15
Same mould used for **Vale** and **Roan.**
[Vale illustrated below.]



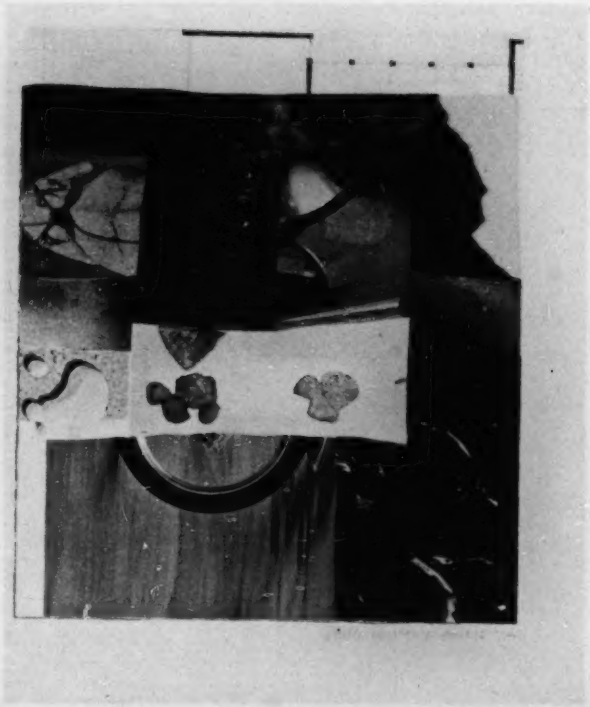


Horsefeathers Thirteen

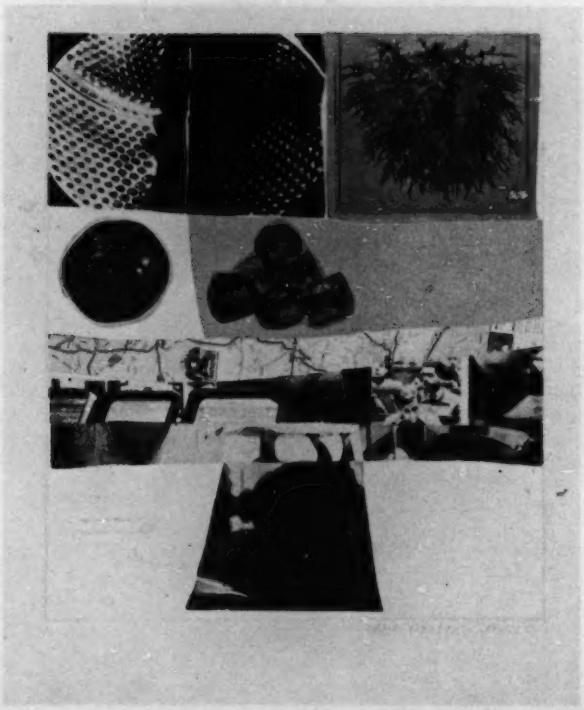
1
Horsefeathers Thirteen–I
71 × 57cm
Size of Edition: 76



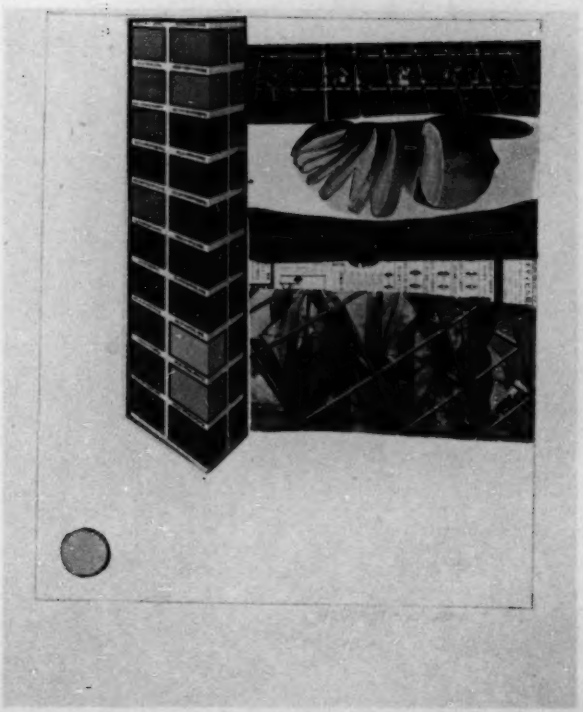
2
Horsefeathers Thirteen–II
70.5 × 57cm
Size of Edition: 73



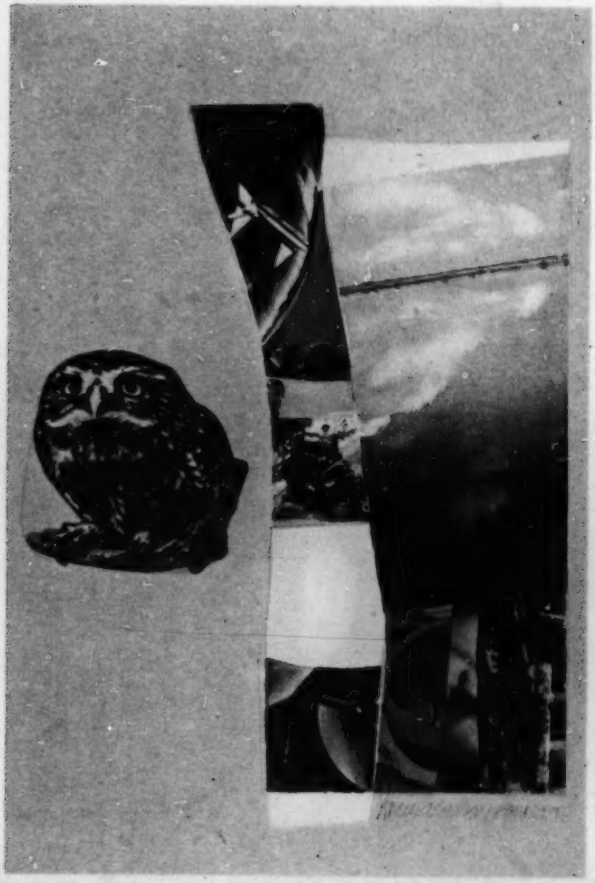
3
Horsefeathers Thirteen–III
71 × 58cm
Size of Edition : 80



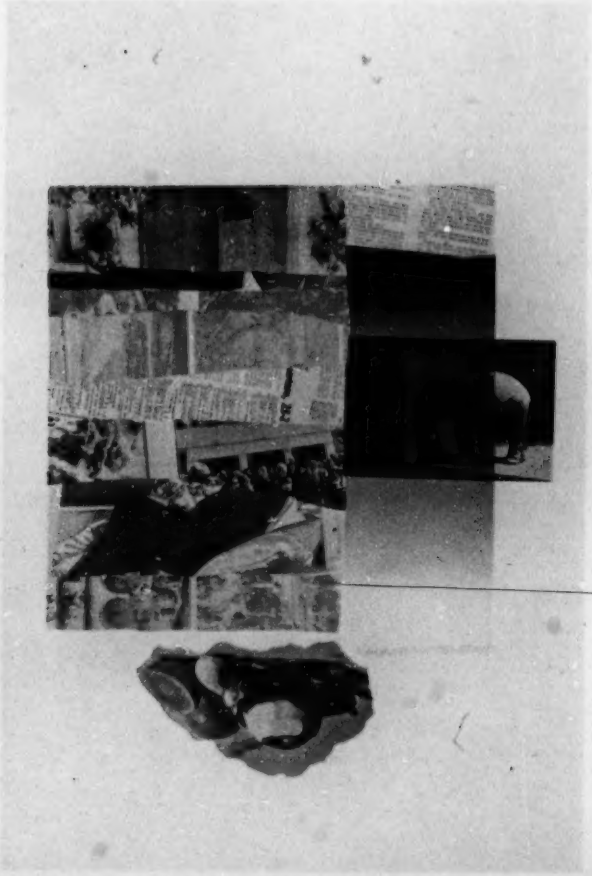
4
Horsefeathers Thirteen–IV
71 × 57cm
Size of Edition : 89



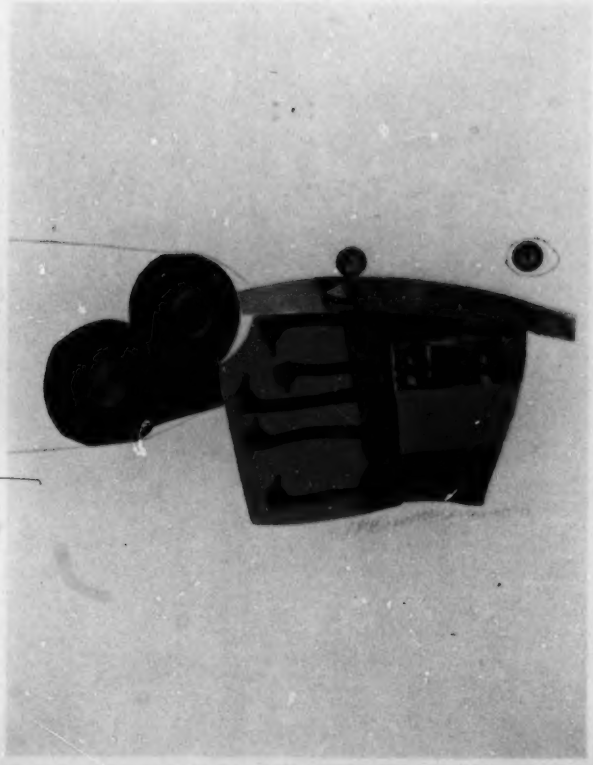
5
Horsefeathers Thirteen–V
61 × 45cm
Size of Edition: 76



6
Horsefeathers Thirteen–X
79 × 86.5cm
Size of Edition: 82



7
Horsefeathers Thirteen–XIV
66 × 52cm
Size of Edition: 83



8
Horsefeathers Thirteen–XV
65 × 52cm
Size of Edition: 80